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UNCLAS SECTION 01 OF 09 TOKYO 000343

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SUBJECT: JAPANESE MORNING PRESS HIGHLIGHTS 01/25/07

Index:

Kyuma report:

- 1) Defense Minister Kyuma criticizes Pres. Bush, calls starting Iraq war was a "mistake"
- 2) Kyuma willing to allow Japan to conditionally export weapons to countries other than US
- 3) Minato ward officials ask for early reversion of USFJ's heliport at Roppongi in downtown Tokyo
- 4) Asahi poll; 78% of the public say they have "patriotic" feelings, but 88% of them also admit Japan should "reflect" on its wartime past

Russia connection:

- 5) Japan, Russia share view that northern territorial issue can be solved through dialogue
- 6) First strategic dialogue between Japan, Russia ends on a high note
- 7) Yachi diplomacy: Vice foreign minister traveled to six countries last year, worked to repair Japan's ties with China, ROK
- 8) Japan to run for non-permanent seat in 2008 since Mongolia has stepped aside
- 9) Political fund management office expenses under new LDP rules will require receipts on items over 50,000 yen

Beef trade:

- 10) US beef not making expected comeback, with import share still less than 10% of pre-ban, due to consumer shift to Australia beef and to pork
- 11) US asking Japan to ease beef import restriction to allow meat from cattle 30 months of age

Education reform:

- 12) Abe administration to present three education-reform bills to Diet
- 13) Education policy clique in the Diet unhappy with new education reform proposals

Articles:

- 1) Kyuma raps Bush for "wrong decision" over Iraq war

TOKYO (Page 2) (Full)
January 25, 2007

Defense Minister Fumio Kyuma expressed a critical view of the Iraq war in his speech delivered yesterday in Tokyo, saying US President Bush launched the war while assuming Iraq had weapons of mass destruction. "I think that decision was wrong," Kyuma said.

Kyuma has been critical of the Iraq war. However, it is unusual for a Japanese cabinet minister to criticize a US president's policy decision.

"In those days, I said the prime minister should have said Japan understands the United States going to war," Kyuma said, adding, "I still think so." With this, Kyuma raised a question again over the

TOKYO 00000343 002 OF 009

Koizumi cabinet's support for the Iraq war.

In connection with the issue of relocating the US Marine Corps' Futenma Air Station in Ginowan, Okinawa Prefecture, in the process of realigning US forces in Japan, Kyuma stressed that the government would like to go ahead with an environmental assessment of a coastal area of Camp Schwab in the northern Okinawa city of Nago as the site for the planned relocation of Futenma airfield. "We will hold talks (with Okinawa) premised and based on the V-shaped airstrips plan (as agreed between the Japanese and US governments)," Kyuma said.

- 2) Kyuma supports expanding exceptional framework for arms exports

MAINICHI (Page 2) (Full)
January 25, 2007

Defense Minister Fumio Kyuma, addressing the Japan National Press Club yesterday, suggested the need for Japan to review its self-imposed three principles on weapons exports, which prohibit Japan from exporting weapons in principle. "I think it's all right for Japan to be allowed to work together with the United States and Europe for joint research to develop universal weapons technologies," Kyuma said. The government, in its statement released in 2004 by the then chief cabinet secretary, excepted Japan's joint development and production of weapons technologies relating to missile defense with the United States. However, there are strong calls from within the ruling Liberal Democratic Party for expanding this exceptional framework for weapons exports to countries other than the United States. Kyuma's remark tuned in to the LDP side. In addition, Kyuma raised a question about the United States' decision over the Iraq war, saying, "I think the decision was wrong."

- 3) Ward chiefs ask municipality for early reversion of US forces' heliport at Roppongi

YOMIURI (Page 31) (Full)
January 25, 2007

There has been an agreement among the central government, Tokyo municipal government, and the US Forces Japan to allow the continued use of the heliport at Roppongi, Minato-ku, that has been provided

to the US forces on a provisional basis in return for the reversion of an adjacent portion of land as a substitute. Upon learning of this agreement, Masaharu Takei, the head of Minato District, and Tosan Kishida, president of the district assembly, visited the Tokyo Municipal Building on Jan. 24 to present a petition seeking efforts to obtain a full and early reversion of the Akasaka Press Center facility, including the heliport.

Regarding the tripartite agreement, the written petition stressed: "We cannot accept the fact that the land being used provisionally as a heliport will not be restored to its original state and returned."

In addition, the petition touched on the agreement signed between the municipality and the US forces to jointly use the heliport during a natural disaster or the like, stating, "We have strong concerns that this will lead to the expanded functions of the US military base and its permanency."

4) Poll: 78% feel "patriotism" toward Japan

ASAHI (Page 2) (Full)
January 25, 2007

TOKYO 00000343 003 OF 009

An estimated 80% of the Japanese people believe they have patriotic feelings toward Japan and 90% of them think Japan should reflect on its acts of aggression and colonial rule in Asia during the past war, the Asahi Shimbun found from its face-to-face public opinion survey. Japan's relations with China and South Korea have been soured by gaps in views on historical issues. However, it may safely be said that the greater part of the Japanese people has a coolheaded view of Japan's wartime history, while feeling a patriotic spirit.

The survey was conducted Dec. 2-3 last year with a total of 3,000 persons chosen from among the nation's voting population.

In the survey, respondents were asked if they thought having been born in Japan was a good thing. In response to this question, 94% answered "yes." They were also asked if they had feelings of patriotism toward Japan. In response, those who answered "yes" added up to 78%, broken down into 20% for "very much" and 58% for "somewhat." The proportion of "yes" answers tends to be less among the young. But even among people in their 20s, it was 63%, far higher than the 37% who answered "no." When it comes to those who answered they had "very high," feelings of patriotism, however, those in their 20s to 40s averaged around 10%. As seen from this figure, strong patriotism was not very high in those age brackets.

Among those who answered they thought it was good to be born in Japan, the proportion of those who had a "high" level of patriotic feelings toward Japan accounted for 21% and "somewhat" for 60%, both higher than the total averages. These figures mirror their sentiment of feeling that they like the Japan where they were born, and this feeling has led them to feel patriotic.

When asked if Japan should reflect on its acts of aggression and colonial rule, those who answered "yes" totaled 85%, broken down into 32% of those who answered "very much" and 53% who said "somewhat." There was almost no generational perception gap on this question. Among those who have patriotic sentiment, the proportion of those who think Japan should reflect on its past conducts was 88%, higher than the total average. Among those who are highly patriotic, the proportion of those who think Japan should self-reflect very much on its past conducts was 39%, topping the total average.

Respondents were further asked if patriotism should be taught at school. In response, the proportions of affirmative and negative answers were close to each other, with "yes" accounting for 50% and "no" reaching 41%. In addition, "yes" outnumbered "no" among those in their 50s and older, and vice versa among those in their 40s and younger. As seen from these figure, public opinion split over the advisability of teaching patriotism at school.

5) Japanese, Russian foreign ministers agree to try to settle territorial issue through talks

ASAHI (Page 4) (Full)
January 25, 2007

Kurashige, Moscow

Administrative Vice Foreign Minister Shotaro Yachi and Russian First Vice Foreign Minister Denisov wound up the two-day first strategic talks in Russia on Jan. 24. Both sides agreed to record the talks as

TOKYO 00000343 004 OF 009

important start on a new page. On the Northern Territories issue, they confirmed that the two countries would try to find a solution by exchanging views. The two also agreed to hold the next round of talks in Japan this year.

In reference to bilateral relations between Japan and Russia, Yachi said, "Despite the efforts by leaders and peoples of the two countries, the relations were not so bright," stressing the importance of continued dialogue. Denisov replied, "We would like to accelerate work to build a partnership with Japan."

6) Only general arguments exchanged on territorial issue in first Japan-Russia strategic talks

NIHON KEIZAI (Page 2) (Full)
January 25, 2007

The first strategic talks of vice foreign ministers from Japan and Russia in Moscow ended on Jan. 24. In the two-day talks, both sides exchanged views on a wide range of areas, such as economic cooperation and defense exchanges, but on the Northern Territories issue, only general arguments were exchanged. The next session is expected to take place in Japan around the summer. Whether both sides will be able to develop an environment to move the territorial issue forward through repeated dialogue is likely to hold the key to whether a Russia visit by Prime Minister Shinzo Abe will be arranged.

Mutual visits between the Japanese and Russian leaders have been suspended since President Putin came to Japan in 2005. The G-8 summit in 2006 was held in St. Petersburg, Russia, and (then) Prime Minister Junichiro Koizumi attended it, but the visit was not official. In view of diplomatic courtesy, Prime Minister Abe's visit to Russia should come next.

But there are no prospects in sight. The Japanese Foreign Ministry has taken a cautious stance about a prime ministerial visit to Russia, a senior official saying: "If the territorial issue remains stalled, (even if the prime minister visits Russia), Japan will only be criticized. It is impossible to easily use the card of a Russia visit by the prime minister." Japan intends to wait for the next move by Russia, which has taken a tough stance.

The prolonged suspension of mutual visits by the Japanese and Russian leaders is also undesirable for Russia in terms of investment from Japan. The Foreign Ministry plans to persistently continue talks until arrangements are made for a visit by prime minister to Russia, based on the view that mutual understanding deepened in the strategic talks."

7) Vice Foreign Minister Yachi a key player to determine prime minister's destiny

ASAHI (Page 4) (Excerpts)
January 25, 2007

Foreign Ministry's Administrative Vice Minister Shotaro Yachi, 63, played up his presence in the first strategic dialogue between Japan and Russia. He has represented Japan in negotiations in promoting an "assertive Japanese diplomacy," as aimed at by Prime Minister Abe. The top bureaucrat making use of his contacts in various circles is a mild-mannered man with a genuine conservative philosophy. However,

TOKYO 00000343 005 OF 009

he is capable of brave and bold action. He is unique and distinctive.

Yachi called on Russian Foreign Minister Lavrov on Jan. 23 and discussed with him a variety of themes, including North Korea, Iran, and UN reform. The meeting lasted for 70 minutes, though it had initially been arranged for 30 minutes. He was treated as if he were foreign minister, an accompanying source saying, "Such a posture of the other side represents its willingness to treat Japan with respect."

It is quite rare for an administrative vice minister to directly engage in diplomatic negotiations. Yachi, though, visited six countries last year. He made arrangements for the tour of China and South Korea by Prime Minister Abe last October. He has close ties with Chinese Vice Foreign Minister Dai Bingguo, and they sometimes go to karaoke bars together.

Yachi is also gutsy, in a sense. When relations between Japan and South Korea became strained over South Korea's radiological investigation in waters near the Takeshima/Dokdo islets last September, he visited Seoul and presented a 20-centimeter-thick batch of documents to Foreign Affairs and Trade Vice Minister Yoo, claiming: "The South Korean government's proceedings are against international law. If Japan brings the case to trial, Japan will win." As a result, he succeeded in securing the other side's agreement on a joint survey.

When Yachi was promoted to assistant deputy chief cabinet secretary from Comprehensive Foreign Policy Bureau director general of the Foreign Ministry in 2002, Shinzo Abe was deputy chief cabinet secretary. In dealing with North Korea's abduction issue, Yachi

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found himself on the same wavelength with Abe, who has called for applying pressure on the North. Even now, Prime Minister Abe meets alone with Yachi once or twice a week. He is an unprecedented "incumbent policy advisor" to the prime minister.

Seeing the Abe administration's popularity plunging, some members in the administration insist that there will be no other means but to score points with diplomatic efforts. Yachi is indisputably a key player in determining the prime minister's destiny.

8) Mongolia gives in to Japan concerning election for UNSC nonpermanent seats in 2008: Japan to declare candidacy

ASAHI (Page 1) (Excerpts)
January 25, 2007

Prime Minister Abe yesterday exchanged views on United Nations reform on the phone with Mongolian President Enkhbayar. The president conveyed his nation's decision not to run in the election for nonpermanent seats on the United Nations Security Council to take place in the fall of 2008 and asked Japan to come forward. Responding to the request, the prime minister announced his desire for Japan to run in the election. Iran is expected to announce candidacy in the Asian framework. However, the UNSC has adopted a sanctions resolution against that nation for its nuclear program. As such, the government views that Japan stands a good chance of becoming a nonpermanent member in 2009.

Abe on the evening of the same day told reporters at the Prime Minister's Official Residence, "We want to fulfill our

TOKYO 00000343 006 OF 009

responsibility in response to Mongolia's favor."

The UNSC consists of five permanent member nations and 10 nonpermanent members. The tenure of nonpermanent members is two years. Elections take place every year to replace half the nonpermanent members. However, reelection for two consecutive terms is banned. Of the 10 seats, two are allocated to Asia, three to Africa, one to East Europe, two to Latin America and two to Western Europe and other regions.

The next step is undertaking coordination with Iran to choose a single candidate from the Asian framework. If the coordination fails, the one that obtains more than two-thirds of valid votes in the UN General Assembly will be elected. A senior Foreign Ministry official noted in confidence that even if an election takes place, Japan stands a good chance, because even if China is opposed, it cannot exercise a veto.

9) Political management office expenses: LDP to revise Political Funds Control Law aiming at requiring politicians to attach receipts -- 50,000 yen or more each case - to political funds reports

TOKYO SHIMBUN (Top Play) (Excerpts)
January 25, 2007

Agriculture, Forestry and Fisheries Minister Toshikatsu Matsuoka and Education, Culture, Sports, Science and Technology Minister Bunmei Ibuki reported huge amounts of money as their political management office expenses in their reports on political funds to the government, even though they used rent-free offices in a Diet members' building. In connection with this issue, the ruling Liberal Democratic Party (LDP) has adopted a policy line of revising the Political Funds Control Law designed to require the attachment of receipts for expenses of 50,000 yen or more each to political funds reports.

In an attempt to play up its efforts dealing with the issue of "politics and money" in the July House of Councilors election, the LDP leadership is now carrying out coordination within the party and its junior coalition partner, New Komeito, aiming at amending the law during the regular session of the Diet, which convenes today. The LDP reform implementation headquarters began yesterday discussion of amending the law at the compliance subcommittee.

The Political Funds Control Law classifies the expenses of a political management organization into operating expenses, including office expenses, utility charges, and labor costs; and political activity expenses such as election related costs and organizational activity expenses. Under the law, politicians are obliged to submit receipts when they used 50,000 yen or more for each political activity, but there is no obligation to attach any receipts to a report on operating expenses, just to list total amounts.

10) Store meat cases without US beef become familiar; Imports after reinstatement of trade are less than 10% of pre-ban level; Customers shifting to Australian beef and to pork

NIHON KEIZAI (Page 3) (Excerpts)
January 25, 2007

It has been six months since the Japanese government decided to resume US beef imports on July 27 last year. The import level after

TOKYO 00000343 007 OF 009

the import resumption is now less than 10% of the pre-ban monthly average recorded in December 2003. Only a limited number of retailers deal with US beef. Yoshinoya beef bowl restaurant chain has put back beef bowls on its menus, but they are served only at lunchtime. With more supermarkets, whose main customers are safety-sensitive housewives, having switched to Australian products, store-shelves without US beef are now a familiar scene. Beef consumption by Japanese customers is undergoing a change, as can be seen in the fact that overall consumption of imported beef has dropped.

Trade statistics show that imports of US beef last November stood at approximately 1,600 tons. The average monthly import before the ban, which was introduced following the discovery of a BSE-infected cow in the US, was 20,000 tons.

Food supermarket chain Top, head office in Setagaya, Tokyo, has resumed sales of US beef. At present its 14 stores can only secure about 300 kg a week. It means each store can only get 70 packs containing 300 grams of beef. They are sold out in a day at some stores.

Few stores sell US beef. US beef accounted for 15% of the beef Aeon sold before the ban. However, the store has put off a decision on whether to purchase US beef citing that it wants to determine whether it is safe to buy US beef. Leading supermarket chains remain cautious, noting that they do not hear strong requests from customers for US beef.

US beef has disappeared from store shelves. What has replaced it?

Low-priced US beef used to be popular in Japan. However, following the end of the import ban, demand for US beef remained low. According to the Agriculture & Livestock Industries Corporation (ALIC), domestic consumption of beef dropped from 904,000 tons in fiscal 2003 to 809,000 tons in fiscal 2004. Consumption of domestic beef dropped by 2,000 tons to 355,000 tons, but consumption of imported beef dropped even more -- 17% from 546,000 tons.

However, sales of Australian products have grown. Of the beef purchased by food supermarket chain Inageya in October 2002, 12% was from Australia and 8% was US products, but it has gradually shifted to Australian products. Now the share of Australian beef is 24%. Live Corporation noted that the "US beef has been entirely replaced with Australian products."

There was a strong image among Japanese consumers that the texture of Australian beef was dry. Cattle fed on grain, whose red meat contains fat, have increased in Australia. Inageya said that this type of meat caters to the taste of Japanese consumers, leading to the increased sales.

11) US applying pressure for eased standards, insisting on introduction of 30-months-or-younger rule; Japan says it is too early to ease standards

NIHON KEIZAI (Page 3) (Full)
January 25, 2007

The US government has begun strengthening pressure on Japan in pursuit of eased import standards applied to its beef. Its point is that the current standard that since only beef from cattle aged 20

TOKYO 00000343 008 OF 009

months or younger can be imported for the prevention of BSE is strict in light of international guidelines, it should be revised now that six months have passed since the removal of the import ban. The Japanese government remains firm on its present stance, noting that it is too early to discuss the possibility of reviewing the standard.

When Agriculture Minister Matsuoka visited the US in the middle of this month, US Secretary of Agriculture Johanns and other officials strongly called on Japan to ease the standard and adopt a 30-months-or-younger rule. It was discovered yesterday that the US government had continued to seek an early easing of the standard in writing even after that. The Japan-US agreement on US beef stipulates that the Japanese side checks whether the US side is observing conditions set for products exported to Japan during the six months after the removal of the import ban. The US position is that since this monitoring period ends this month, Japan should ease the import standards. However, the Japanese government is cautious about the idea of revising the standards, including further inspections of facilities from where products are shipped to Japan, with an Agriculture Ministry official noting, "We have yet to conduct inspections of the US export system."

12) Prime Minister Abe to submit three education reform bills to regular Diet session based on education reform panel's interim report

NIHON KEIZAI (Page 1) (Excerpts)
January 25, 2007

At a meeting yesterday of the Education Rebuilding Council headed by Ryoji Noyori, Prime Minister Shinzo Abe revealed his intention to submit to a regular session of the Diet to start today a set of

three bills related to education reform, including a bill revising the school education law aimed at a review of the so-called pressure-free education system and the introduction of a teachers' license renewal system. He ordered to the ruling coalition and the education ministry to draft legislation, aiming at passing the bills through the Diet during the regular session. The education reform panel adopted in its meeting yesterday the first interim report stipulating such proposals as increasing classroom hours by 10%. The panel then handed it to Abe.

Main points of education reform panel's interim report

7 Review the cram-free education and increase classroom hours by 10%

7 Utilize a system to suspend offending students from school and support them recovery

7 Treat excellent public school teachers by increasing pays and promotion

7 Introduce a teachers' license renewal system

7 Set up a third-party organ to assess schools

7 Review the boards of education and integrate them that municipalities with the population of 50,000 or less

13) Education policy clique unhappy with education reform panel's primary report

YOMIURI (Page 4) (Full)
January 25, 2007

TOKYO 00000343 009 OF 009

Many in the ruling Liberal Democratic Party (LDP), particularly lawmakers representing educational policy interests, expressed unhappiness with a primary report compiled by the government's Education Rebuilding Council. The report calls for a review of the so-called pressure-free education system. The education policy clique appears to have sought to check the Prime Minister's Official Residence's initiative in reforming the education system.

The LDP and its coalition partner, New Komeito were briefed last evening by Special Advisor to the Prime Minister on Education Eriko Yamatani on the report at the ruling camp's education rebuilding study panel headed by Tadamori Oshima. The meeting lasted two hours, but the panel put off approval to the next session.

Many LDP lawmakers, who have advocated the pressure-free education system, made specific requests of Yamatani, with former education minister Takeo Kawamura saying, "Rejecting the pressure-free education system does not lead to reform of education."

At the meeting, the fact that Prime Minister directed Education Minister Bunmei Ibuki to submit to the regular Diet session to be convened today a set of three bills, including a review of the school teachers' license system came under the lash. New Komeito Acting Chief Representative Toshiko Hamayotsu warned: "I want the prime minister to let the ruling coalition to discuss the bills before submitting them."

SCHIEFFER